Tourist Development Council
Pinellas County
July 15, 2026 Meeting Minutes

The Pinellas County Tourist Development Council (TDC), created under Pinellas County Ordinance 78-20 pursuant to Section 125.0104, Florida Statutes, met in regular session on this date at 9:00 AM in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building, 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater, Florida.

Present

Dave Eggers, Chair, County Commissioner
Russ Kimball, Vice-Chair, Sheraton Sand Key Resort
Katie Gannon, City of Oldsmar Mayor
Dave Gattis, City of Belleair Beach Mayor
Copley Gerdes, City of St. Petersburg Councilmember
Phil M. Henderson, Jr., StarLite Cruises
Dylan Hubbard, Hubbard's Marina
Doreen Moore, Travel Resort Services, Inc.
Chuck Prather, The Birchwood Inn
Bruce Rector, City of Clearwater Mayor
Clyde Smith, Bilmar Beach Resort

Not Present

Chris Latvala, County Commissioner (non-voting)
Trisha Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry

Others Present

Amanda Coffey, Managing Assistant County Attorney
Brian Lowack, Visit St. Pete-Clearwater (VSPC) President and CEO
Craig Campbell, Director of Community and Brand Engagement, VSPC
Eddie Kirsch, Director of Digital and Data, VSPC
Franchesca DiNapoli, Senior Board Records Specialist, Deputy Clerk
Other interested individuals

All documents provided to the Clerk's Office have been filed and made a part of the record.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Chair Eggers called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM; whereupon, he requested that Mayor Gannon lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Eggers provided brief comments regarding a recent event hosted by AMPLIFY Clearwater and its focus on tourism, jobs, the City of Clearwater, and Pinellas County.

APPROVAL OF TDC MINUTES – MAY 20, 2026

Upon the Chair's call for a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Hubbard made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Prather and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No one responded to the Chair's call for public comment.

Messrs. Smith and Henderson arrived at 9:02 AM.

Deviating from the agenda, Chair Eggers requested a motion to allow Ms. Moore to participate virtually in today's meeting; whereupon, Mr. Hubbard made a motion, which was seconded by Mayor Gattis.

PRESENTATIONS

Capital Funding Budget Allocation Recommendation

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Mr. Lowack reviewed recent revisions to the Capital Projects Funding Program, including the addition of beach park facilities as eligible projects and a requirement that the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) establish the total funding available prior to each two-year application cycle. He also briefly reviewed the current allocation of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenues between destination marketing and capital projects, with dedicated funding for beach nourishment.

Mr. Lowack indicated that staff is proposing $30.6 million in funding for the 2026 cycle, consisting of $15.3 million for both traditional capital projects and beach park facilities; that the proposed funding, combined with funding dedicated to beach nourishment, represents approximately 24% of total TDT collections; and that staff believes that this approach would allow for continued investment in capital projects and beach park facilities while maintaining beach nourishment funding and building reserves for future projects.

Thereupon, discussion ensued wherein Mr. Lowack, with input from Office of Management and Budget Manager Andrew Brown, responded to comments and queries by the members and provided information regarding various topics, including the following:

- Projected TDT capital fund balances and future funding considerations
- Transfer of State beach nourishment funding to capital reserves
- Eligibility and matching requirements for beach park facility projects
- Future beach nourishment costs and funding needs
- Beach nourishment easement requirements and federal funding
- Existing capital project obligations and timelines
- Flexibility between capital project funding categories

During discussion, Mr. Gerdes expressed concern regarding the proposed allocation for beach park facilities and its impact on funding available for traditional capital projects.

In response to comments and a query by Messrs. Hubbard and Gerdes, Mr. Lowack clarified that traditional capital projects and beach park facilities are subject to separate application standards and compete for funding within their respective categories; and that funding may be made available between the categories if qualifying requests in one category do not materialize; whereupon, Mr. Henderson made a motion to support staff's recommendation, which was seconded by Mr. Prather.

Further discussion ensued, with input from Mr. Lowack, regarding the allocation of TDT revenues between destination marketing and capital projects, accumulation and use of TDT reserves, and proposed funding levels for beach nourishment, beach park facilities, and other capital projects; whereupon, following the Chair's call for the vote, the motion carried by a vote of 10 to 1, with Mr. Gerdes dissenting.

FY26 Elite Event Request

Deviating from the order of the agenda, Mr. Campbell referred to a PowerPoint presentation and provided an update regarding the Fiscal Year 2026 Elite Event funding request for the Clearwater Offshore Nationals. He indicated that Tampa Bay Charities, Inc. is no longer the event organizer; that Race World Offshore, LLC was named the new organizer and submitted a new application requesting $125,000.00 in funding; and that there are no substantive changes to the event's footprint; whereupon, he related that staff is recommending funding in the amount of $125,000.00, which is consistent with the amount previously approved for the event.

Upon the Chair's call for a motion to approve, Mr. Gerdes made a motion, which was seconded by Mayor Gattis and carried unanimously.

FY27 Elite Event Recommendations

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation titled *FY27 Elite Event Recommendations*, Mr. Campbell indicated that 63 applications were received, totaling approximately $5.1 million in requested funding; that this represents an increase from 50 applications totaling $3.59 million in requested funding from the previous year; and that the program's budget is $3 million; whereupon, he reviewed the eligibility criteria and maximum funding levels for the five Elite Event categories and discussed various factors considered by staff when evaluating the applications, including attendance and tourist data and implementation of a one-year rule providing that funding for returning Elite Events may not decrease below 50% of the previous year's funding level.

Mr. Campbell explained that, due to eligible funding requests exceeding the program's budget, staff developed a tiered funding approach; that events in Categories 1 and 2 would remain eligible for their maximum funding levels; that events in Categories 3, 4, and 5 would be eligible to receive up to 70%, 60%, and 50% of the applicable category maximums, respectively; and that this approach is intended to prioritize high-impact events while providing funding to as many eligible events as possible.

Mr. Campbell then reviewed the number of events qualifying within each Category and provided details regarding use of the funds, noting that funding for events in Categories 1 and 2 is negotiable to maximize event visibility; and that funding for events in Categories 3 through 5 would be divided equally between marketing and sponsorship; whereupon, he referred to a spreadsheet titled *FY27 Elite Event Recommendations*, reviewed staff's funding recommendations, and highlighted various circumstances affecting certain events, including the use of three-year attendance averages for two weather-impacted events, relocation of three events from other markets, bundling of five St. Pete Pier events, and application of the 50% rule for several events.

Thereupon, Mr. Campbell summarized that staff is recommending funding for 46 applications and one five-event bundle totaling $3 million; and that the events recommended for funding are projected to generate more than one million attendees and over 500,000 tourists.

In response to comments and queries by the members, Mr. Campbell, with input from Mr. Lowack, provided information regarding the following topics:

- Application of the 50% funding rule to otherwise ineligible events
- Methodology for determining tiered funding levels
- Basis for the tiered funding percentage
- Process for increasing Elite Event funding
- Potential consideration of event duration and tourist stays in future funding cycles

Upon the Chair's call for public comment, the following individuals appeared and provided brief comments:

Keith Overton, no address provided
Cathy Hayduke, Treasure Island

Mr. Hubbard provided brief comments regarding the timing associated with distribution of potential additional Elite Event funding and its impact on events occurring early in the fiscal year; whereupon, Mr. Lowack explained that staff would still need a funding recommendation from the TDC to present to the BCC.

Discussion ensued regarding potential funding recommendations, including increasing the program's funding allocation and alternatives should additional funding not be approved; whereupon, Attorney Coffey clarified that the Tourist Development Plan currently limits Elite Event funding to $3 million; and that, in order to increase funding for Fiscal Year 2027, the TDC would first need to recommend an amendment to the Plan establishing a higher funding limit.

At the Chair's request, Mr. Campbell provided an overview of the additional funding needed to fund qualifying events at the applicable funding maximum or requested amount, whichever is less, totaling $367,500.00, as follows:

- Category 2 - $2,500.00
- Category 3 - $147,500.00
- Category 4 - $100,000.00
- Category 5 - $117,500.00

In response to comments and queries by the members, Mr. Campbell clarified that events would not receive funding in excess of the amount requested; and that application of the 50% rule may result in different funding levels for events within the same category; whereupon, Mr. Gerdes proposed that, if additional funding is not approved by the BCC, funding recommended for new events in Categories 3 through 5 be redirected to returning events in those categories, thereby reducing the funding decrease for returning events to approximately $2,700.00 per event.

Mr. Hubbard then made a motion to recommend a one-year amendment to the Tourist Development Plan in order to increase the Fiscal Year 2027 Elite Event funding allocation to $3,367,500.00. Responding to comments and a query by Mayor Rector, Attorney Coffey clarified that subsequent funding motions may be made contingent upon BCC approval of the additional funding; and that the proposed increase to the Elite Event funding limit would apply only to Fiscal Year 2027, with the $3 million limit remaining in place for future fiscal years; whereupon, Mr. Hubbard's motion was seconded by Mr. Gerdes and carried unanimously.

Attorney Coffey indicated that a motion is now needed to recommend funding the events at the maximum amounts available if the Tourist Development Plan is amended, or to approve staff's funding recommendations if the amendment is not approved.

Chair Eggers left the meeting, and Vice-Chair Kimball assumed the gavel at 11:04 AM.

Mr. Hubbard then related that he would make the motion stated by Attorney Coffey. Responding to a comment by Mr. Gerdes, Mr. Hubbard clarified that his intent is to recommend fully funding eligible events at the amounts for which they qualify; and that Mr. Gerdes' proposed alternative would be considered separately as a fallback should the BCC not approve the additional funding; whereupon, the motion was seconded by Mr. Henderson and carried unanimously.

Discussion ensued regarding a potential alternative funding approach suggested by Mr. Gerdes, through which funding for new events in Categories 3 through 5 would be redistributed among returning events if the BCC does not approve the additional Elite Event funding; whereupon, Attorney Coffey clarified that the proposal would conflict with the motion previously approved by the TDC, which provided for staff's funding recommendations to take effect if the additional funding is not approved; and that the previous motion would therefore need to be reconsidered.

Following brief additional discussion, Mr. Hubbard made a motion to re-evaluate the previously approved motion. The motion was seconded by Mr. Gerdes and carried unanimously; whereupon, Mr. Hubbard made a motion, based on the amended Tourist Development Plan, that the events be fully funded based on their qualifications.

Responding to a comment by Mr. Lowack, Mr. Hubbard clarified that the intent of his motion is to fully fund all eligible events, with Mr. Gerdes' alternative funding proposal to be considered separately if the BCC does not approve the additional funding. Attorney Coffey then clarified that the motion is to fund eligible events at the applicable funding maximum, contingent upon amendment of the Tourist Development Plan; whereupon, the motion was seconded by Mr. Gerdes and carried unanimously.

Mr. Gerdes made a motion that, if the BCC does not approve the proposed amendment to the Tourist Development Plan and the additional funding, staff's recommendations for Categories 3 through 5 be modified to eliminate funding for new events and redistribute those funds among returning events in those categories, thereby limiting the funding decrease for each affected returning event to approximately $2,700.00. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hubbard and carried unanimously.

In response to a query by Mr. Prather, Mr. Gerdes confirmed that the alternative funding approach would utilize the full $3 million program budget; whereupon, the motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was recessed at 11:15 AM and reconvened at 11:22 AM.
During the recess, Mr. Gerdes and Mayor Gannon left the meeting.

Destination Metrics

Mr. Kirsch referred to a PowerPoint presentation and provided information regarding takeaways from Spring 2026 (February – April), including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of TDT collections, visitation, and hotel revenue. He also highlighted trends related to key visitor markets, hotel and vacation rental performance, travel party composition, and special events as a reason for visitation; whereupon, Mr. Kirsch reviewed metrics for May 2026, including statistical data and year-over-year comparisons of TDT collections, total visitors, hotel and vacation rental occupancy and average daily rate, and visitor origin markets. Lastly, he provided details related to the pace of hotel and vacation rental bookings for the next six months.

Responding to a query by Mr. Hubbard, Mr. Kirsch provided information regarding the sample size and limitations of vacation rental origin market data.

Mayor Gattis left the meeting at 11:36 AM.

Envisionit Marketing Update

Referring to a PowerPoint presentation, Envisionit Group Account Director Vanessa Garippo discussed the *Beach. Culture.* Campaign's development and its focus on differentiating St. Pete-Clearwater from other beach destinations by highlighting the area's cultural offerings in addition to its beaches. She also reviewed work completed to date, including media strategy and planning, content capture, asset production, and landing page development.

Envisionit Vice President of Strategy Data and Analytics Matt Stinnett reviewed the campaign's two-phase rollout, indicating that the initial local and in-state launch is intended to build awareness and evaluate campaign performance prior to a nationwide launch in September; whereupon, he briefly discussed the campaign's target audiences and use of various digital, video, audio, and out-of-home advertising channels.

Envisionit Vice President and Creative Director Amber Davis then discussed the creative strategy for the *Beach. Culture.* campaign, including tailoring the emphasis on beach and cultural experiences to specific target audiences; whereupon, she presented examples of campaign materials, including connected television, digital, print, social media, influencer, and audience-specific advertising.

Ms. Garippo concluded by discussing next steps for the campaign, including nationwide expansion, integration of *Beach. Culture.* messaging into meetings and conventions marketing, and future international applications.

VSPC PRESIDENT AND CEO UPDATE

Mr. Lowack introduced representatives of Lou Hammond Group, VSPC's new public relations agency; whereupon, Senior Vice President Mackenzie Comerer introduced members of the agency's team and provided brief comments regarding its local presence and national resources.

Thereupon, Mr. Lowack also provided an update regarding upcoming 727 Day activities and promotions, including promotional giveaways, partnerships with local businesses, and the 727 Day mobile passport.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS

Mr. Prather noted the recent passing of former State Senator Jack Latvala, father of Commissioner Chris Latvala, and provided brief comments regarding Senator Latvala's support of the tourism and hospitality industries.

Mr. Henderson indicated that he and acting Chair Kimball will soon reach the end of their service on the TDC due to term limits; and that consideration should be given to extending or eliminating term limits to maintain experienced members and institutional knowledge on the Council.

Mr. Smith noted that the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association Pinellas Chapter's Recognition of Service Excellence (ROSE) Awards will be held on September 3; and that the event recognizes service excellence among individuals in the hospitality industry.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 PM.